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The Arts Issue

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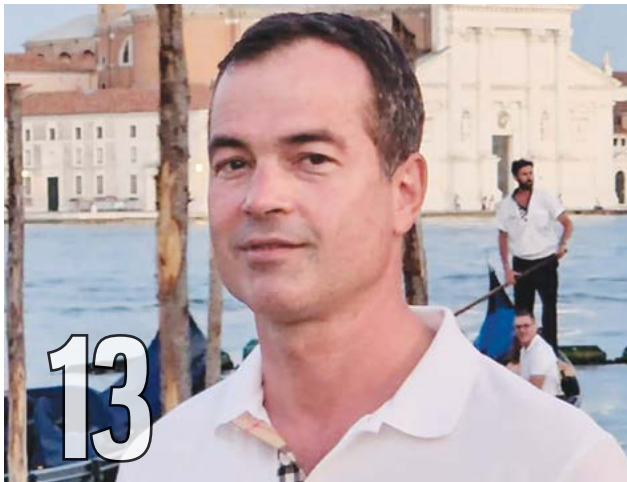
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Chappell Roan performing at Lollapalooza in August.  
Photo: Pooneh Ghana for Lollapalooza 2024

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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

Love, art, intrigue and understanding. That's right, bestie, BTL has all the info you need to have a moment to remember, full of all the drama necessary to perfectly cap off your brat summer. We know your notes app is packed with delightful anecdotes and witty commentary, so try your hand at stand-up. Not feeling that? Then find solace in the arms of another at an LGBTQ+ dating show. From learning queer history to pondering works of art, punctuate your late summer with a memory you won't soon forget.



City Tour Detroit guide Michael Boettcher. Courtesy photo

## Immerse Yourself in Detroit LGBTQ+ History

City Tour Detroit centers often-overlooked voices with its new walking tour: "Detroit Comes Out." Over the course of two hours, follow the path of the courageous queer ancestors that came before you and acknowledge their impact on Detroit's history. Tour creator Michael Boettcher said he hopes to promote deeper LGBTQ+ understanding. "As a member of the community, I wanted to understand our own special history," he said. "I dug into the research and put together this downtown walking tour to showcase the locations of the first acknowledged gay and lesbian bars and Black queer spaces in Detroit, tell some of the stories of their denizens, describe the homophobic environment in which they opened and talk about how, by the early 1970s, Detroit and Michigan were actually ahead of the U.S. in terms of nondiscrimination policy."

Aug. 24, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Guardian Building (500 Griswold St., Suite 250, Detroit). Book a spot at [citytourdetroit.com/tour/detroit-comes-out](http://citytourdetroit.com/tour/detroit-comes-out).



## Get Your Fill of Arts, Beats and Eats

The sights, sounds and smells of Arts, Beats and Eats are right around the corner: eye-catching works from the Corewell Health Juried Fine Art Show, about 50 food vendors from all over the state and toe-tappin' music from a variety of artists, including rock band Cheap Trick, R&B favorite Keith Sweat and Detroit native blues performer Thornetta Davis. Soaring Eagle's Arts, Beats and Eats in downtown Royal Oak has something for everyone. With festivities running for four days, you have plenty of opportunities to satisfy your inner creative and to explore the arts all in one place. Bring the whole family — a kids zone and carnival rides are sure to make this an event you don't want to miss.

Aug. 30-Sept. 2, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. (9 p.m. on Monday), downtown Royal Oak (Eleven Mile Road and West Street). Learn more at [artsbeatseats.com](http://artsbeatseats.com).



Drag and pizza at Woodward Avenue Brewers. Photo: Instagram

## Sing Your Heart Out

With Chappell Roan topping the charts, you might be wondering how to get your own career as the next queer pop icon off the ground. Woodward Avenue Brewers' Drag Karaoke, which welcomes all, is at least a start! And you're in good hands: those of Michigan queen and host Mimi Southwest, who will at least make you feel like you're slaying the house down. No cover at the door — just bring your voice.

Thursdays, 8 p.m.-12 a.m., Woodward Avenue Brewers (22646 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). Register at [bit.ly/4dKzC6s](http://bit.ly/4dKzC6s).





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## Find The One at 'Secret Admirer'

Match Made's "Secret Admirer LGBTQ+ Dating Show," set for Aug. 22 at Bowlero in Royal Oak, is a meet-cute moment waiting to happen. A dramatic (and probably, welcome) departure from typical dating app culture, the show's host introduces eligible mystery suitors to audience members, who get the chance to spend time with potential matches at private tables. Who knows where the night might take you — will you find a soulmate or just a great story for your next first date? Either way, this highly unique dating adventure is surely worth a shot.

Aug. 22, 7:30-10 p.m., Bowlero (4209 Coolidge Hwy., Royal Oak). Further information at [bit.ly/3yF3i68](https://bit.ly/3yF3i68).



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Stand-up comedian Lisa Green. Photo: Libby O Photography

## Express Yourself at Depot Town Comedy Open Mic

Take your refined tastes to a space full of LGBTQ+ community members ready to laugh with you as you dive into stand-up. "It was my goal to make a safe space where anyone who wanted to try stand-up comedy could and would feel supported," said Lisa Green, host and creator of Depot Town Comedy Open Mic. Green added that other shows just don't have the same energy as queer ones. "Every time I've done a queer comedy show, the joy and sense of community from the audience is palpable and feels so much different than a typical comedy show," Green said. "I encourage everyone in the LGBTQ+ community to embrace stand-up comedy as an expression of queer joy and support these emerging community spaces!"

Aug. 28, 7:30-10:30 p.m., 734 Brewing Company (15 E. Cross St., Ypsilanti). More details at [bit.ly/4dp7Exh](https://bit.ly/4dp7Exh).



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Photos: Andrew Potter and Chris Azzopardi

# ‘Optimism, Hope and Love’

At her Detroit campaign stop, Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris showed support for the LGBTQ+ community, who felt the love

BY LIAM CLYMER

With many LGBTQ+ supporters eagerly awaiting her arrival, Kamala Harris made an entrance fit for a presidential nominee in Detroit on Aug. 7. “I just got a text message — we’re about to see something very magical happen here soon,” 97.9 WJLB Detroit radio personality Bushman said to a crowd of Michigan voters who had been waiting for hours for the big moment.

And sure enough, from inside a densely packed aircraft hangar at Detroit Metro Airport with Beyoncé’s “Freedom” blaring over

the speakers, there it was: Air Force Two and, moments later, “Momma-la” herself, the name her stepchildren affectionately call her, had arrived. As our Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, who officially secured the party’s nomination for President earlier this month, and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, stepped down from the plane, they waved and smiled gleefully to a large number of invigorated Americans.

Michigan voters turned out in large numbers to see the two speak, with estimates ranging from 12,000

to 15,000 people in attendance. “It’s been a pretty interesting 24 hours for me, I’ll have to be honest,” Walz said. “And I don’t know how I can explain to you walking into that arena in Philly, or that field out in Wisconsin, or right here to what I have been told is the largest rally of the campaign.”

**‘The freedom to love who you love openly’**

Rally speakers, including staunch queer ally Gov. Gretcher

Whitmer, addressed LGBTQ+ rights as a critical issue.

Harris reaffirmed her dedication to the LGBTQ+ community as she spoke on “hard-fought” freedoms. “Our fight is a fight for the future and it is a fight for freedom,” she said. “Across our nation we are witnessing a full-on attack on hard-fought, hard-won fundamental freedoms and rights and we will not stand for it.”

“Attacks on the freedom to vote, attacks on the freedom to be safe from gun violence, the freedom to breathe clean air and drink clean water, the freedom to love who

you love openly and with pride and the freedom of a woman to make decisions about her own body,” she added.

In her speech, Whitmer roused attendees as she further emphasized the freedoms that would be protected under the Harris-Walz administration, including, she said, “the freedom to be who you are and love who you love.” “Kamala Harris’ vision for our future is all about freedom — can you all say ‘hell yeah?’” Whitmer said as the crowd did exactly that.



## Donald Trump, plus a trending protest moment

At one point, audience members began to chant, “Lock him up.” “Hold on,” Harris responded. Here’s the thing — the courts are going to handle that. We’re going to beat him in November.”

Harris reminded attendees of Donald Trump’s intentions if he were to take office. “The man has openly vowed, if reelected, that he will be a dictator on day one,” Harris said.

“Let us be very clear. Someone who suggests we should terminate the Constitution of the United States should never again stand behind the seal of the President of the United States,” she added.

Pro-Palestinian protesters also interacted with Harris during her remarks. A small group of attendees said, “Kamala, Kamala, you can’t hide. We won’t vote for genocide.”

In her response, Harris didn’t directly speak on Israel and Palestine or the attacks on Gaza, but instead said, “I’m here because we believe in Democracy,” she said. “Everyone’s voice matters. But I am speaking now. I am speaking now.”

When protests continued even after Harris used one of her now-famous lines, she drew a comparison between protest and support for Trump. “You know what, if you want Donald Trump to win, then say that,” she said, staring at the protesters like she meant it. “Otherwise, I’m speaking.”

## Of course Walz’s daughter is named Hope

When Walz made his appearance, he admitted that the last 24 hours had been exhausting for him.

“We’ve got 91 days and I keep telling people: 91 days. My god, you can do anything for 91 days,” Walz said.

Audience members quickly piped up to correct Walz — only 90 days remained. “90? Christ, I haven’t slept in 24 hours,” he added. “You know why? We’ll sleep when we’re dead.”

Walz said there were a number of issues he was going to continue to work on tirelessly.

He specifically noted common sense gun regulation. “We believe strongly in Minnesota in the second amendment, just like you do, but we also believe strongly in common sense gun violence prevention law,” he said. “...we settle our political differences not through violence, but with our votes.”

Walz shared a personal story on the importance of In vitro fertilization (IVF). “This is very personal for my family,” he said. “When my wife [Gwen Walz] and I decided to have children, we went through years of fertility treatments.”

“I remember every time the phone rang, I’d catch my breath; I’d feel nervousness and then it would be a crushing feeling when they told us that the treatments didn’t work,” Walz added. “The agony of that, I can feel to this day. But I can also feel some joy in this. Because it wasn’t by chance

government officials. Speakers included U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, Lt. Gov. Gavin Gilchrist, and U.S. Reps. Debbie Dingell and Elissa Slotkin.

When Whitmer spoke, she drew a comparison between Trump and Harris. She said Harris, who mentioned working at McDonald’s as a young person, had lived a “normal life.”

“She understands what the average person is going through because, guess what, she lived a normal life,” Whitmer said. “She was raised by a single mom who had a full-time job. She moved in with her sister to help her raise her children. She took care of her mom when she was battling cancer. And she is a proud stepmom with a beautiful blended family who call her ‘Momma-la’ — and I know a lot of us identify with some of those characteristics.”

Congresswomen Haley Stevens noted a pattern of Michigan

palpable outpouring of queer support on hand. One attendee, openly gay Plymouth City Commissioner Alanna Maguire, who also happens to be the wife of Attorney General Dana Nessel, complimented Walz on his support of LGBTQ+ Americans before even getting involved with politics. “I think that the story that we learned — that he was a high school teacher who sponsored this

resonates with our community and we know when somebody has our back, and when somebody is an ally, and it’s clear he is.”

Rally attendee Anthony Wagner of West Bloomfield said the energy of the Harris rally was reminiscent of the excitement that Obama generated during his initial presidential bid. “The energy at the rally was electric. I attended two rallies for Obama in



Anthony Wagner. Photo courtesy of Anthony Wagner

*“Our fight is a fight for the future and it is a fight for freedom. Across our nation we are witnessing a full-on attack on hard-fought, hard-won fundamental freedoms and rights and we will not stand for it.”*

— Kamala Harris

when I say this, when we finally conceived and our daughter was born, we didn’t hesitate at all — we named her Hope.”

## A star-studded event

The Harris-Walz rally was a star-studded event with a plethora of Michigan Democratic

voters electing women. “I think Michigan knows a thing or two about sending women to high office,” Stevens said.

## Queer support: loud and proud

Harris-Walz staffers wore shirts reading, “Harris For Everybody” — an apt slogan among the

first gay-straight alliance club — really shows that he’s been on the forefront of that issue quietly for years,” she told BTL. “It’s [his] strong Midwestern values — inclusivity and love and support for everyone. I think he’s a great pick.”

Openly gay Ann Arbor City Councilmember Travis Radina echoed Maguire’s instincts about Walz and his longtime allyship. “I think his record speaks for itself on LGBTQ+ issues, but outside of politics, who he is as a person has spoken to that throughout his life,” Radina said. “I think that he

2008, and last night felt just like it did then — full of optimism, hope and love,” Wagner said. “Knowing that Kamala and Tim are fierce advocates for the queer community, and seeing the transformation they’ve brought to the Democratic Party in just two weeks, helps me feel more safe and secure about our country’s future than I have in years. I cannot wait to vote in November.”

As the sun set behind Air Force Two, Harris left voters with one final question: “So, Michigan I ask you: Are you ready to make your voices heard?”

They seemed more than ready.



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# Michigan LGBTQ+ Choruses Sing to the Rafters at National GALA Choruses Fest

First gathering in eight years focused on camaraderie and connection



Sistrum Lansing Women's Chorus. Courtesy photo

**BY JORDYN BRADLEY**

The GALA Choruses Festival, held July 10-14 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was something to sing about, and not just because six Michigan-based choruses were in attendance. Among them were PRISM, Out Loud Chorus, Sing Out Detroit, LanSING Out Chorus, Grand Rapids Women's Chorus and

Sistrum Lansing Women's Chorus.

The festival, which is the largest LGBTQ+ choral event in the world, gathered nearly 7,000 performers from 122 choruses across the globe to sing, connect and create lasting memories that go beyond pure entertainment.

"The important part is affirming LGBTQ+ people and their visibility through music," says Tim Hamann,

an Out Loud Chorus board of directors member. "It's about supporting each other, promoting each other and validating each other within the community."

Many performers shared that the event was about cheering on other organizations and performers, as the festival is an exhibition and not a competition. Because the event was closed to the public, organizations

relied on one another to be their cheerleaders, and festival performers say their peers did not disappoint.

"[GALA] was packed floor to ceiling with amped-up singers wanting to clap at everything," says Amy Saari, Sing Out Detroit's director. This seemed to be the theme for every group's performances.

Within the first 16 measures of Out Loud's performance of "Bridge

Over Troubled Water" by Simon & Garfunkel, artistic director Saleel Menon says they received a standing ovation, which "set the tone" for the week for them.

"It was the most receptive, electrifying and engaged audience I think any of us have ever experienced," says Menon. Out Loud also dedicated their rendition of Whitney Houston's "How



Will I Know” to survivors of the AIDS epidemic. Like many other Michigan groups, Out Loud is an intergenerational chorus. Menon says bringing historical context into the pieces helps younger queer people engage with older members who lived through important moments in queer history.

This year was Menon’s first time attending the festival. Now, he says, he “gets” why it keeps people coming back. “It’s a celebration of these safe spaces and safe communities we’ve created across the world, and all of us got to be in the same place together,” he says.

GALA — the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses — is a non-profit organization that serves over 12,000 singers from 190 choruses throughout North America. Its mission is to support, guide and inspire LGBTQ+ choruses and their allies to leverage the liberating power of singing to create harmony and equity for all, according to its website.

“Every social justice movement has had its soundtrack, and the soundtrack always includes group singing. Group singing has always been a social justice pursuit,” says Saari.

“Singing is done with our bodies and is a form of healing. It’s an opportunity for singers to heal themselves and their listeners from the impact of injustice.”

To represent Detroit, Sing Out started their set with Aretha Franklin’s “Think.” Then to tie in Minneapolis, they sang a rendition of Minnesota-native Bob Dylan’s song, “The Times They Are A-Changin.” Fittingly, the festival took place near a famous five-story mural of Dylan that features lyrics to the song.

Many performances included themes and touched on topics important in queer history and the overall queer experience.

Grand Rapids Women’s Chorus’s theme was finding home and belonging, which they highlighted in a piece called “I Am” by singer and composer Jennifer Schofield.

“It is composed of affirmations: I am home, I belong, I am worthy, I am loved, I am beautiful,” says GRWC’s founder and artistic director, Lori Tennenhouse.

“When you’re in a choir, you go into rehearsal, you sing songs, you perform them. This becomes the soundtrack of every day. And [Schofield] wanted that to have an impact on the singers as individuals, and also the group as a whole.”

Darin DeWeese, artistic director

of PRISM Men’s Chorus, curated a setlist that included the hymn, “Nearer, My God, to Thee.” He says they chose this piece for their performance in Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis “to honor the space and highlight the inclusivity of this cathedral to the queer community.”

For many, though, GALA and the overall ability to perform as groups of queer individuals is about more

for all,” says DeWeese.

This year’s festival was the first since 2016, as GALA typically runs every four years and had to cancel the planned 2020 event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the world was shut down, local choruses saw their numbers dwindle, as they were largely unable to come together to not just sing (aside from in COVID-

“Queer choruses have always been a place for this — not only a place of music, but a place of sanctuary, refuge and community for all.”

— Darin DeWeese, PRISM Chorus’ artistic director



(Right) PRISM artistic director Darin DeWeese. (Above) Fellow singers cheer on performers at the GALA festival. Photos: Lou R. R. Zurn

than the songs.

“There are not many places that a 20-year-old and an 80-year-old can stand next to each other and experience the same shared experience together. Queer choruses have always been a place for this — not only a place of music, but a place of sanctuary, refuge and community

cautious ways, like outdoors or in a virtual format), but also to physically lean on each other for support.

“Choral activity across the world came to a grinding halt,” says Saari, who also says that not being able to closely gather to sing at the time was “devastating.”

But arguably the hardest part



heard, they can be loved, hugged, feel a sense of belonging, and be a found family.”

Now, many Michigan choruses have seen numbers grow tremendously in this “post-pandemic” time, due to people looking for community and a way to combat loneliness, though some local chorus members stress that there can often be a financial burden when attending festivals like GALA due to travel, lodging and missing work. Many choruses offer scholarship opportunities for events that require traveling, and rely on community support, including monetary donations, keeping up with them on social media and attending performances.

This kind of support allows Michigan’s LGBTQ+ choral groups to keep representing the state at events to come.

“Michigan has a reputation for high-quality choral music across the country. Michigan has got it going on!” says Menon.

about adapting during the pandemic was figuring out how to live without their support system always around.

“A lot of queer people feel segregated and not always seen or are afraid to be seen,” adds Melissa Louise Hews, who is on the board of directors of Sing Out Detroit. “For me, the choir provides a space where people can be seen, they can be



## U.S. Supreme Court to Queer Kids in Red States: You Don't Matter.



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

What if I told you that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the Biden Administration's rule protecting LGBTQ+ students from discrimination in schools must be enforced in all 50 states? That would be pretty incredible, wouldn't it?

And by incredible I mean not at all credible, because of course the extremist-packed Supreme Court did the exact opposite.

Biden sought to expand protections under Title IX, which bans discrimination based on sex, to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

And, of course, leaders across the United States were like, "Yes! Of course! We must protect people."

Alas, that is also not true.

According to Reuters, lawsuits were filed by "Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Idaho, and numerous Louisiana school boards, and another lawsuit by Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Virginia, West Virginia and an association of Christian educators."

“

*If they overturned the right to an abortion, you can bet your ass they will overturn the right to be legally married.*

So, yeah.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti argued that the Biden administration had overstepped and that the rule "adopts a controversial worldview about 'gender identity,' orders schools in every state to conform their policies to it and threatens dissenters with the loss of billions in federal funding," according to The New York Times.

Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill was also aghast at the Biden Administration trying to protect people she, personally, does not like or consider fully human. She

called it "extreme gender ideology."

"This is all for a political agenda, ignoring significant safety concerns for young women students in pre-schools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities across Louisiana and the entire country," Murrill said according to Reuters.

Ah. Ignoring "safety concerns for young women." In other words, Murrill is peddling the transphobic lie that transgender people are perverts who pose a threat to women and girls. Never mind the fact that the vast majority of women and girls who are victims of sexual assault are assaulted by cisgender men. If only Republicans were as committed to stopping something that actually happens on the regular.

Murrill complained that if the Biden Administration's Title IX rule was enforced, schools would "have to change the way they behave and the way they speak."

Well, if the schools in question are discriminating against LGBTQ+ students and calling them offensive epithets, then,

yes. The schools would have to change. That's kind of the whole point of the proposed rule change. Because grown-ass adults all over the country can't be trusted to not harass and terrorize children and young adults based on religious convictions that ensure them that God wants them to be total creeps.

Look, I don't speak for God. But being nice to kids doesn't seem like a real stretch when it comes to the whole "what would Jesus do" thing.

Needless to say, LGBTQ+ advocates are not happy.



"These are not just policies they're attacking; they're attacking human beings — our children — who deserve love, respect and acceptance," SarahJane Guidry, executive director of Forum for Equality, Louisiana's LGBTQ+ human rights organization, told the Shreveport Times.

"It is disappointing that the Supreme Court has allowed far-right forces to stop the implementation of critical civil rights protections for youth," Cathryn Oakley, senior director of legal policy for the Human Rights Campaign, said, according to the Times.

Disappointing, indeed. But not at all surprising. The Supreme Court has a solid right-wing majority with a mandate to bring home wins for the religious right.

If the current Supreme Court justices were on the bench in 2015, there would be no marriage equality. It, like abortion, would be up to individual states to decide. We'd be right back to a time when married LGBTQ+ people faced a patchwork of legal rights — when you could travel across the country and be legally married then legally not married over and over again, depending on what state you were in.

Speaking of abortion, this "let the states decide" bullshit is not working out great. You don't have to look far to find horror stories about a post-Roe world, especially for people of color.

If they overturned the right to an abortion, you can bet your ass they will overturn the right to be legally married. And hetero folks aren't safe, either. These folks also want to do away with no-fault divorce and ban birth control.

Republicans are a danger to freedom, full stop. We've got to vote them out. And we definitely need to keep disgraced former president and convicted felon Donald Trump from setting foot in the White House ever again.



Suspect Arraigned in Devon Hoover Murder

After months of investigation, 34-year-old Desmond Burks has been charged with the murder of Dr. Devon Hoover, a well-known neurosurgeon from Detroit. Dr. Hoover, 53, was found dead in the attic of his Boston Edison home on April 23, 2023, wrapped in a bloody carpet with two gunshot wounds to the head. His body was discovered a day after his Range Rover was found outside another Detroit residence. Police initially visited his home but left when no one answered. The following day, a welfare check was conducted at the request of Dr. Hoover’s family, who

were concerned after he missed a trip to visit his dying mother. On Aug. 8, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced multiple charges against Burks, including first-degree premeditated murder, felony murder, larceny over \$20,000, possession of a firearm by a felon, and three counts of felony firearm. Investigators revealed that Dr. Hoover had approximately 4,000 communications with a phone number linked to Burks, indicating an intimate relationship. Despite challenges finding cooperative witnesses, significant evidence connected Burks to the crime. Burks, who has a prior criminal record, is being held in the Wayne County Jail on a \$1 million bond. He also faces separate murder charges in an unrelated 2024 road rage incident.



Dr. Devon Hoover. Family photo



Gary Murphy (left) with husband BC Cabangbang. Courtesy photo

Remembering Gary ‘Murph’ Lynn Murphy

Gary (“Murph”) Lynn Murphy of Birmingham, 89, died Aug. 3, 2024 in Bloomfield Hills after a brief hospitalization. Murphy is survived by BC Abad-Murphy Cabangbang, his life partner of over 33 years and husband since 2015; his sister, Barbara Hofweber, and his beloved dog, Jaz. A dedicated educator and beloved community member, he served as an elementary school teacher in Detroit for his entire career. He was a proud alumnus of Wayne State University, where he later established an endowed scholarship with his husband. Murphy was known for his eclectic gatherings, deep faith and generous spirit.

Murphy was an active member of the Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit, which will host a memorial service at 1 p.m. on Aug. 24 at the Zion Lutheran Church in Ferndale.

Read the full obit online.

Dan Levy in “Schitt’s Creek.” Photo: Hulu

Mpox Back on the Radar

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, a public health emergency of international concern due to an ongoing outbreak in Central and West Africa, which has now spread to Sweden. This is the second time in two years that mpox has reached this level of global concern. Mpox is caused by a virus related to smallpox, typically spread among animals but occasionally jumping to humans, leading to outbreaks.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reported over 17,000 suspected cases, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the outbreak began. Mpox symptoms include a rash, fever and fatigue, and it spreads through close contact — the MSM community is especially vulnerable. Locally, mpox vaccines are available through private medical practices and several public health-focused organizations, including the Oakland County Health Division, which will administer free vaccines at Transgender Pride in the Park in Ferndale on Aug. 24 from 12-6 p.m. Affirmations is offering several vaccine clinics (see page 25).

Gay C/DC to Play The Magic Bag

All-gay AC/DC tribute group Gay C/DC is coming to The Magic Bag Aug. 31. With a star-studded lineup of LGBTQ+ musicians, they bring the energy of a bygone era of rock without breaking a sweat. Gay C/DC performances are packed with campy twists and queer gags that are sure to entertain. Tickets at bit.ly/3X9iUs9.

Harris-Walz Dazzle with... Press Releases?

BTL staffers are on high-alert for media advisories from the Harris-Walz campaign after receiving a recent release entitled “TODAY: Donald Trump to Ramble Incoherently and Spread Dangerous Lies in Public, but at Different Home” ahead of Trump’s recent, rambling press conference from his New Jersey golf club, which, the media advisory reports, is “not a battleground state.” Trump, the campaign reminds the media, was the “loser of the 2020 election by 7 million votes.”

Dan and Eugene Levy to Host Emmy Awards

Eugene and Dan Levy will make history as the first father-son co-hosts at the Emmy Awards on Sept. 15. The duo, who swept the 2020 Emmys for “Schitt’s Creek,” said in a statement, “For two Canadians who won our Emmys in a literal quarantine tent, the idea of being asked to host this year in an actual theater was incentive enough. We’re thrilled to be able to raise a glass to this extraordinary season of television.”





# The Michigan Roots of the Midwest Princess

Chappell Roan's Interlochen instructor on the impact of an artist who 'knocked me out immediately'



See our  
exclusive  
interview with  
Chappell Roan  
on page 16!

Chappell Roan. Photo: Ryan Clemens

## BY LIAM CLYMER

For its princess, Chappell Roan, the roots to the Midwest run deep. At Michigan's own Interlochen Arts Camp, Roan wrote the song that would help launch her career into the realm of superstardom nearly a decade later.

Artist and educator Seth Bernard was a songwriting instructor at Interlochen Arts

Camp over the summer of 2014. Hiding in his small group of students was the young, not-yet-discovered Roan.

Recently, Bernard described the camp to BTL as a "beehive of creativity," where attendees are free to explore the arts in a diverse, inclusive and LGBTQ-friendly environment. He said campers at Interlochen are able and encouraged to be themselves —

some for the first time if they're coming from rural or small-minded communities.

Roan, who grew up in Willard, Missouri, where "gay boys in my school who were out got terrorized, slurred, threatened," was that camper. In fact, she told BTL's editorial director Chris Azzopardi in 2023 that Interlochen "literally changed my life" for the very reasons Bernard mentions. And that

was before her life would change even more dramatically.

At the beginning of August, Roan shattered a record for daytime crowd sizes at Lollapalooza and will make her awards show debut at the MTV VMAs on Sept. 11, when, in addition to performing, she could walk home with awards for Best New Artist and MTV Push Performance of the Year. She also



has seven songs currently charting on the Billboard Top 100.

"I've never met creative kids before that camp, and it changed my trajectory forever," the 26-year-old pop star told Azzopardi. "I'd never been with other songwriters before in my life that were my age. Everyone was a fucking hippie, and I'm from Trump country. I'm from a heavily church background, and this is not that. There were kids from all over the world there. It was just so inspiring."

Roan isn't the only star to have ties to Interlochen. Artists such as Tony-winning crooner Josh Groban and country and pop star Jewel credit Interlochen as a public art institution that shaped their musical careers.

At Interlochen, Roan wrote the song "Die Young" — a song which later led to her being sought out by record labels and signed to Atlantic Records (she's now on Island Records).

The slow-building song laced with heavy imagery describes the feeling of losing oneself, but punctuates its message with a triumphant ending reminiscent of the themes of love and joy found in Roan's later work.

Bernard said he was instantly struck by the maturity of her songwriting. "She knocked me out immediately. The song that ended up becoming her anthem from that camp was 'Die Young,'" he recalled. "It was a new song for her and she played it for me and it hit me in so many ways. First of all, it's a really great, powerful song and I noticed that she was writing from a very mature place."

"Songwriting can serve you in a very personal way if you can use it as a way to alchemize some of the more difficult things that you go through or that you see in the world and write about it," Bernard said. "And she was doing that. 'Die Young' was that already."

Bernard realized then that her art had the power to profoundly impact people, himself included. "I had gone through a lot that was heavy on my heart and had more to go through ahead of me at this time of this camp in 2014," he said. "She played the song and it hit me in all the ways, and it was also a gift for me personally and as a mentor to young people creating songs. To be able to hear someone really going deep in their craft and when they do it, it's like a blessing for the people that hear it — that was the thing I remembered most."

Courtney Kaiser-Sandler, associate director of contemporary music and collaborative programs at Interlochen, recalled that the song didn't just leave an impression on Bernard, but the entire camp when Roan performed it at their closing concert. "I remember her standing out — just her songwriting and her artistic lens definitely was different than others, and it was one of those things as a songwriting teacher where you're like, 'Wow, that's super unique. Who is this person? This is really great,'" she said.

In that performance, Kaiser-Sandler said

she saw Roan's "appetite for trying to reach an audience" and that when she performed, audience members couldn't help but want to "jump on her idea — to be in the song with her."

Bernard said it's this sense of community that gives campers the leg up they need to grow as artists. "You'd see a group of singer-songwriters come together, and many of them for the first time being in the company of a dozen other singers and songwriters their age, who are very passionate and doing it at a high level," he said. "It was an accelerator for people. It raised the bar in a way that also built community."

But collaboration wasn't encouraged from just students; Bernard compared his instruction to developing conversation. When he talked to students about activism and the power of the mic, conversations were often centered around their experiences. "They [2014 students] had this passion in their hearts for gay rights, for the environment, for social justice, for using music to lift up voices of marginalized people and to improve quality of life for people who are suffering," Bernard said. "So when we had that discussion as a group, there was this energy that built and there was this feeling of possibility that grew in the group. And I felt so energized myself because I have often, at different times in my life, felt like I was sort of going against the current."

Now, Roan uses her platform for advocacy — often featuring queer performers and giving back money to LGBTQ+ charities. At her headlining show at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit last October, she invited local drag queens to open for her and donated proceeds from every ticket sold on the entire tour to For The Gwols, a collective that connects Black transgender people with everyday living expenses and medical care.

"You never know on what scale people are going to take action," Bernard said. "It's worth it to try to bring some of that [activism] into the space not knowing what the impact will be, but knowing that seeds have been planted."

In the 10 years following Roan's time at Interlochen, Bernard has been raising his now 10-year-old daughter. And in a full-circle moment, in a piece of music his daughter felt empowered to create and decided to share with him, he said he found a familiar voice. "It's very inspiring for me," Bernard said. "It gave me goosebumps for days to make all the connections."

"Then, to go into [Roan's] music and what she's been writing lately and to feel inspired as a songwriter, that's a very sort of distilled thing that you look for as an artist — to find inspiration through other people," he added. "I have been able to find inspiration through my students pretty consistently through the years and I'm really grateful and honored for that. I'm looking forward to continuing to follow her and to be impacted by her music and her work as an activist."



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Chappell Roan performing at Lollapalooza in August. Photo: Pooneh Ghana for Lollapalooza 2024

# We Knew Her When

Everything Chappell Roan told us about drag, Michigan and making straight boys dance

**BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI**

When we connected in late September 2023 from her tour bus, some of Chappell Roan's first words were, "Hopefully this Zoom works." You might call that iconic if Roan were the star she is now, when fame turns every sound bite into a viral TikTok. At that moment, Roan wasn't asking for much — just a stable, uninterrupted connection. Back then, before her single "Good Luck, Babe!" gave her even more lift, she had high hopes for her career but was still focused on the basics. Today, Roan is

a chart-topping mega success who may or may not be unintentionally losing wigs on stage, and so her concerns are far grander than ensuring her Zoom is functioning smoothly. Someone else can do that for her! There's a follow-up album to be recorded!

In the almost 11 months since our interview, Roan's career has taken off spectacularly, a rare trajectory for any artist. Though it may seem like her rise was swift, 26-year-old Roan has been building her career since before she was a teenage camper at Interlochen in Michigan back in 2014. After possibly making history earlier

this month with what may be the "biggest set of all time" at any Lollapalooza festival worldwide with 110,000 concertgoers, according to a festival spokesperson via CNN, it's hard to believe I saw her perform at a modest club in Detroit, where she played to about 1,000 people at St. Andrew's Hall last October, a month after releasing "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess." It's thrilling to see Roan take center stage and inspire many young queer people by showing them what success can look like for a dedicated, young queer woman, particularly one who, as she told me, came from "Trump country."

After all, every future Midwest princess needs her queen.

Truth be told, this interview from just before that Detroit show almost didn't happen. With a small, niche media team like ours, it's often a balancing act to manage our workload, and I almost had to let this one slip. But I have Martha Tang (and Lady Gaga) to thank for ensuring it didn't. Tang, who works for Mighty Real Agency and has previously been a publicist for Gaga, played a crucial role. In 2008, during Gaga's debut with "The Fame," when many queer media journalists bypassed the chance to



interview her, thinking she'd be a passing trend, Tang persuaded me otherwise. When Roan was about to release her debut, Tang again encouraged me to prioritize this opportunity. She drew a parallel between Roan's rising star and Gaga's breakthrough in 2009, noting that many journalists regretted passing on pre-fame Gaga.

Now, in retrospect, my conversation with Roan captures a time when her life was still relatively ordinary — who doesn't hope for a working Zoom? — and reflects how it has since transformed into something extraordinary, for both her and our community.

**How is life on the road?**

I am very lucky and love touring. I know a lot of artists really hate it. They think it's horrible, but I love it. It's just like now that I'm on a bus, I have nothing. It's so Gucci and I don't have anything else that I want right now. It's so awesome.

**You're just a few dates into the tour. When you look out at the crowd, is it just one big queer party?**

Last night I played Salt Lake City. Obviously everyone's dressed up, there's drag queens in the crowd. There's a lot of twinkie girlies and there's the occasional random straight boyfriend standing right front and center, just there for his girlfriend. And it's every show. Everywhere I play there's always just one random boy who doesn't want to be there, but it's fine. They're the ones I pick on the whole time. I called some guy out last night and I was like, "What's your name?" He was like, "Seth," and I was like, "Are you good at dancing? And he was like, "No." I was like, "Well, we are about to teach you 'Hot to Go!'"

**He had all those twinks to teach him, right?**

Yeah. And I was like, "You better get ready. You fucked with the wrong pop star."

**How did he do?**

He was very embarrassed. I could tell he hated it, but I was like, you're at my show. You're going to have fun.

**I feel like your success has been a long time coming. Label issues, a pandemic. And the album is finally here. What does that feel like?**

I feel really at peace, which is something that I didn't really know I would feel. But I just feel gratitude and peace. I'm very proud of myself, I'm proud of my team, I'm proud of my friends that helped make this, and I'm proud that I kept going through all of the part-time jobs, through being dropped by a label, through all the breakups, through

all the times my bank account was nearly empty. I'm very grateful that I kept going, and it feels very good, it feels very right. I'm having a blast on tour, and I think as long as I'm literally putting on shows that make people happy, or playing music that makes people feel seen and heard, I can't ask for anything else. All my dreams came true. This is it, I don't need anything else.

**When did you first see yourself as a performer?**

Well, I opened for Declan McKenna, who's a U.K. pop rock artist in 2018.

**I mean, as a child, did you always envision this for yourself?**

No. I mean, when I was little, like 10 and under or a tween, I had it in my head that there's no way I could ever be this girl. That's what this project is honoring — that inner child of mine — and proving to her that she deserves to be that version and that she does exist. But when I was on tour with Declan, I was so jealous of them, because they had glitter on their face every night, and they threw balloons in the audiences and they were jumping off amps and speakers and everyone was screaming, and I was like, "Why am I doing this job and that's not it? There's no reason to be doing this job if it doesn't feel like that." So I just love performing. I feel very myself on stage. I feel like that's what I was put on this Earth for — to throw fun parties.

**You said that you didn't think that you could have this life, and here you are. What was holding you back? Was it being a queer person in the Midwest that made you feel limited?**

I didn't see myself as queer growing up at all. So that was one thing, one hump I had to go over. The other hump was loving myself, feeling confident in my body and loving my music. All three of those things were non-existent. [A crew member on the bus wakes up as Chappell is talking.] Oh, I'm so sorry. I did not know you were down there. I'm so sorry. I'm doing an interview. Sorry. Someone's really sleeping in the bunk next to me, I did not know someone was there.

**We'll keep it down.**

Anyway. There were so many things that I had to get over that I just deemed impossible for myself, and I think a lot of it came from my community that I grew up in, just not really supporting women in the way that helped women grow out of what served men. I felt that I was only meant to be a mother or a wife and a loyal woman of God,

See *We Knew Her When*, page 26

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# Breaking New Ground at Williamston Theatre

Playwright Terry Guest's journey from 'The Magnolia Ballet' to 'Thirst'

BY BRIDGETTE REDMAN

Terry Guest gets compared to other playwrights — especially those who, like him, are Black, queer or Southern. But Guest's voice is uniquely his own, as he writes stories that skew conventions and create magical worlds.

"People will just say, 'You're the next...' and then insert whatever Black playwright they know," Guest said. "They told me August Wilson. When 'Strange Loop' first came out, lots of people were comparing my work to Michael R. Jackson's work. Let me say — Michael Jackson is amazing and I love 'A Strange Loop.' And our work is in the same museum, but not in the same frame."

Currently based in Chicago, Guest's theatrical work has received growing acclaim with such works as "The Magnolia Ballet" and "Marie Antionette and the Magical Negros" earning multiple awards.

In the 2022-2023 season, Plowshares Theatre in Detroit and Williamston Theatre jointly premiered "The Magnolia Ballet," directed by Plowshare's Gary Anderson, bringing Guest's storytelling to Michigan audiences.

Tony Caselli, Williamston's artistic director, was so impressed with Guest, his voice and his style that he tapped him for their first-ever commission, which launches their 18th season in September with a six-week run. "Thirst" is a futuristic thriller set in Michigan after the Great Lakes were poisoned by a catastrophic spill.

Williamston Theatre specializes in new works. However, "Thirst" marks a historic moment for the theater.

"It's the first time I ever went to a playwright I liked and said, 'Hey, I want to give you money to have you write a play that is sort of about these topics. Go and do that and if we want to produce it, we will. If we hate it, we just won't produce it and you can do what you want with it,'" Caselli said.

Repeated news stories about the Great Lakes, Nestlé and flooding in New Orleans had focused Caselli's attention

on what he wanted. He said he told Guest that Williamston wanted a play about water rights, human rights, late-stage capitalism and the need to profit off everything.

"He went away for a while and came back with the first draft of this awesome play set 20-30 years in the future," Caselli said. "It's not post-apocalyptic, we're not in 'Mad Max,' but we're well on our way to the 'Mad Max' world. It's a murder-mystery thriller that's got a ton of humor in it and a ton of intrigue."

In "Thirst," which Guest is still rewriting after staged readings and workshops with Williamston over the summer, Jazz lives in Tablet Housing. The residents of the low-income housing systems don't have access to fresh water. Instead, the government provides them with tablets, which they claim fulfill the body's need for water. Jazz's wealthy boss offers her a way out, but only if she does the seemingly unthinkable.

The timing worked for Guest. He'd just come off several productions of "The Magnolia Ballet" and was ready to head in a new direction.

"I was at a point in my life and career where I had spent a couple of years working really hard to make my name as a writer and to start to introduce the world to the kind of writer that I wanted to be," Guest said. "When Tony came to me with this opportunity, I felt like it was a chance to really say something important and to make an actual change in the world and my community."

For a writer who, up to this point, had specialized in queer stories about the Black experience replete with magical realism, "Thirst" blazes a new trail.

"I wanted to create something that would challenge me," Guest said. "I didn't want just a show that would feel like people who are anti-climate change are bad and the activists are good. If you're sitting in the theater watching it, then you know that you're one of the good ones and they're the bad guys out there. I thought it could be much more



Terry Guest. Courtesy photo

See **Terry Guest**, page 30



# The Michigan Supreme Court is Chosen by The People, the U.S. Supreme Court is Not

The Michigan Supreme Court is the highest court in the state, making decisions on critical issues that impact everyone. It's important to know the citizens of Michigan have the power to elect the people who are entrusted with this vital role in our state government.

During any given term, issues that come before the Michigan Supreme Court can include civil rights, environmental regulations, criminal justice, reproductive rights, gun safety, fair elections, and more. The justices who serve on the court help shape Michigan's future, reviewing over 2,000 appeals every year and choosing the most complex, significant cases to help ensure a just and fair outcome.

Michigan is one of only 24 states that empowers voters to elect state Supreme Court justices, which is a civic duty as important as any choice you make on your ballot.

This is completely different from United States Supreme Court justices, who are nominated by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Although both the U.S. Supreme Court and the Michigan Supreme Court act as the final authority in interpreting laws and judicial rules at the federal and state level, respectively, there are other differences, too.

Unlike U.S. Supreme Court justices, who serve for life, Michigan Supreme Court justices are elected for eight-year terms. Candidates for the Michigan Supreme Court must be a qualified elector, a licensed Michigan lawyer for five years, and under the age of 70 at the time of their election.

Seven justices serve on the Michigan Supreme Court at a time. When their term is complete, they can run for re-election if they meet the requirements. In 2024, Justice Kyra Harris Bolden is the only incumbent running for re-election. She is the first Black woman to serve on the Michigan Supreme Court, having been appointed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2022 when a vacancy on the court needed to be filled. That is part of the process in Michigan, and is the only time a Supreme Court justice is appointed and not elected.

Although Justice Bolden may not have been a household name at the time, she previously served in the state House for four years. During her time in the House, Justice Bolden sat on the Judiciary Committee and introduced bipartisan legislation designed to protect citizens' rights. Before that, she was a litigation attorney. These are the kinds of qualifications that ensure that Michigan Supreme Court justices understand the rule of law, the importance of fairness and equity, and demonstrate the level of integrity and education this important role requires.

Supreme Court justices in Michigan must be nominated by a political party, but their political affiliation is not included on voters' ballots. So it's essential to do your homework to understand the values and experience of candidates once they are officially nominated, especially if you want to ensure a balanced court that will protect the rights and freedoms of everyone in Michigan.

This year, Michigan voters will choose who fills two open spots on the Michigan Supreme Court. The votes you cast can make an impact for a generation. That's why it's essential to understand how to vote for Michigan Supreme Court justices.

Even if you vote a straight-party ticket, you must individually cast your vote for justices in the non-partisan section of your ballot. It's easy to find – if you know to be looking for it. So don't stop at the top! Keep going through your entire ballot to vote for two Supreme Court justices in the non-partisan section.

Every election – and every vote – matters. Learn more about your voting rights, get more information about the Michigan Supreme Court, and check out what the non-partisan section of your ballot will look like. Visit [www.misupremecourtrocks.com](http://www.misupremecourtrocks.com) for all this and more.

-Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director



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**The Triple Crown**  
Puzzle can be found on page 29

# Fall Theater Preview: Queerness Abounds!

7 shows you won't want to miss



Cast of the North American tour of "Moulin Rouge." Photo: Matthew Murphy

## BY LIAM CLYMER

## Cabaret

Your season has arrived, Michigan theater lovers! Is there anything more satisfying than filling up your upcoming fall calendar with plans to see all the exciting new shows on the horizon?

This year has been a big one for queer theater — another new interpretation of "Cabaret" was the talk of the town and Tony award winner "Some Like It Hot" centered queer voices both in its narrative and with its performers. So you can get a taste of the LGBTQ+ theater scene that's finally getting the recognition it deserves, BTL has details on the best shows near you.

"Cabaret" will be staged in Adrian at the historic Croswell Opera House, a venue older than the sprawling history of revivals and reinterpretations of "Cabaret" itself. On Broadway, "Cabaret," which debuted in 1966, was recently reimagined for a modern audience with a new interpretation, "Cabaret at the Kit Kat Club." Croswell's version of the celebrated Broadway production goes back to basics. Under a 1930s Berlin backdrop, those walking into the tangled story found under the dim lights of the Kit Kat Club can still expect to connect with the iconic musical's broader themes of queerness and struggle for personal freedom.

Sept. 13-22, Croswell Opera House, Adrian. [croswell.org/cabaret](http://croswell.org/cabaret)

## Moulin Rouge

Two nightclub-themed shows back to back? How scandalous! But even if you've been to the Kit Kat Club, it's still well worth a stop in the titular Moulin Rouge. Within its walls is a battle for the bohemian way of life — a living based in creative expression and love. As the club faces closure, a young composer named Christian voices his struggle for love and expression through remixes of classic pop songs and original melodies.

The atmosphere of "Moulin Rouge" is bombastic and filled with elaborate sets. With this production taking



place at the Detroit Opera House, it's ripe with jaw-dropping potential.

Sept. 17-Oct. 6, Detroit Opera House.  
bit.ly/4dlwjTp

Fat Ham

“Fat Ham” is a Black, queer reinterpretation of “Hamlet.” The show’s central character, Juicy, finds himself face to face with the ghost of his father, who demands he avenge his murder. This bizarre and comedic journey leads him to a family cookout where deeper questions on love and loss are explored.

Detroit Public Theatre producing artistic director Courtney Burkett told BTL it’s important to tell queer stories because they’re central to any community. “We think it’s important to have LGBTQ+ voices represented on our stage because they are in our community and of our community,” she said. “We want to make sure that all those voices are being represented, heard and are part of the conversation.”

Burkett encourages everyone, including those new to Detroit Public Theatre, to come out for the show. “Come see what we’re doing here because we made it for you — we made it for our community,” Burkett said. “We want everyone to check out what’s happening here and to hopefully find a place where they feel like they belong.”

Sept. 26-Nov. 3, Detroit Public Theatre. bit.ly/46HyQVG

Some Like It Hot

This four-time Tony award-winning musical adaptation of the 1959 film starring Marilyn Monroe has gender at its core, a theme that especially resonates with the topic currently omnipresent in our political landscape. In the movie and musical, main characters Joe and Jerry don drag



Cast of “Some Like It Hot.” Photo: Marc J. Franklin.

personas — Josephine and Daphne, respectively — after witnessing a mob hit and join an all-female jazz band to skip town.

This lively new take on a classic has garnered a reputation for its LGBTQ+ representation both in its script and casting. J. Harrison Ghee, who originated the role of Jerry/Daphne and explores gender identity in their own journey over the course of the show, was the first non-binary person to win a Tony for Best Leading Actor in a Musical.

Oct. 1-13, Fisher Theatre.  
bit.ly/4dElbQq


The Grown-Ups

This Ringwald Theatre production is focused on change — how tradition changes you, and how you can change tradition. These ideas are explored through the lens of camp counselors as they try to shape the young minds of the future.

Director Jennifer Goff said that the topics explored in the play may resonate with the experience of LGBTQ+ community members. “The Grown-Ups’ shines a light on the dangerous toxicity of extremity and othering,” she said. “The characters in this play are dealing with how the smallest poison pill can spiral into catastrophic consequences that fracture families and communities. It looks at how these fractures affect young adults when they are forced to compensate for the broken systems around them.”

Artistic director Joe Bailey said the Ringwald has been implementing new policies to ensure the voices of LGBTQ+ creatives are heard. “There were so many stories I wanted to be able to tell about the gay experience, and I think we’ve been true to that ideal,” Bailey said. “Representation matters, and I wanted all kinds of people to be able to see themselves in our shows. At the beginning of

See Fall Theater Preview, page 22



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### ◀ Fall Theater Preview

Continued from page 21

last season, we decided to stop planning seasons in advance. We did this primarily to allow ourselves to be more nimble — to be able to find a show we love and be able to share it immediately.”

Oct. 11- Nov. 4, *The Ringwald Theatre at Affirmations, Ferndale.* [bit.ly/4dJv9RL](https://bit.ly/4dJv9RL)

### The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Double the “Rocky,” double the fun. Both the Wharton Center and the Fisher Theatre will host screenings of the queer-coded cult classic “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” with each featuring an original cast member as part of the 49th Anniversary Spectacular Tour. The tour will feature a screening of “Rocky Horror,” a shadow cast, meet-and-greet opportunities and a costume contest.

Actor Barry Bostwick, who played Brad Majors in the original film, said shadow casts are one of his best favorite parts of these events. “I love it because I get to meet the really diehard ‘Rocky Horror’ fans, who are the shadow cast,” he told BTL. “They have kept us alive for 50 years and are so happy to be part of something that not only is fun, but meaningful.”

Bostwick said “Rocky Horror” is a rite of passage for some — a realization that “this is what the world could possibly be.” “Rocky Horror” is joyous and a party, but it also has a meaning, Bostwick said. “Freedom. I think it’s freedom from preconceived thoughts and actions. And I think it’s about opening up to possibilities. And non-judgment for yourself or for others.”

Oct. 15, *Wharton Center (with original cast member Barry Bostwick — Brad Majors),* [bit.ly/4dIkZjZ](https://bit.ly/4dIkZjZ)

Oct. 17, *Fisher Theatre (with original cast member Patricia Quinn — Magenta),* [bit.ly/46JBI4e](https://bit.ly/46JBI4e)

### A Drag Queen Christmas

A fabulous Christmas celebration will sashay into the Fisher Theatre just in time to deck the halls. The longest-running drag tour in America, now in its 10th year, “A Drag Queen Christmas” features host Nina West and a slew of other “RuPaul Drag Race” alum, such as Roxxy Andrews, Plane Jane, Crystal Methyd, Plasma, Lady Camden, Brooke Lynn Hytes and Jimbo The Drag Clown. You even have the chance to meet your favorite queens before the festivities kick off.

Nov. 13, *Fisher Theatre.* [bit.ly/3X1xwK8](https://bit.ly/3X1xwK8)

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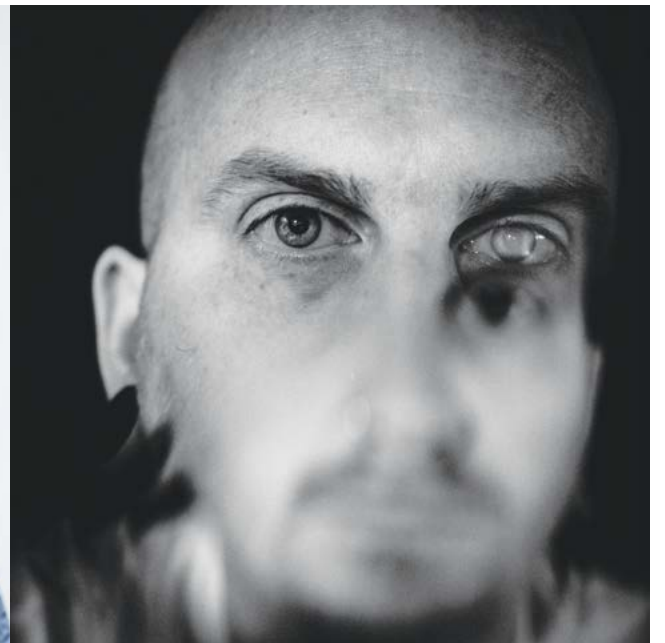
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# Meet 3 Artists Creating Queer-Influenced Work for ArtPrize

Exhibits focus on affirmation, inspiration and the amplification of marginalized voices



(Left to right) Isabel Dowell, Craig Rhyan and Pat ApPaul. Courtesy photos

## BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ahead of ArtPrize, the annual international art competition that takes over much of downtown Grand Rapids each year, hundreds of artists are finalizing details for exhibits featuring every imaginable medium, subject matter and scale. From massive canvases to kinetic sculptures, immersive hands-on installations, classic portraiture and evocative modern works, attendees will be hard-pressed to view every work of art on display at the 16-day event. Organizers are working with over 150 exhibit sites, including art galleries, outdoor public spaces, retail locations, churches and more. All told, ArtPrize, now in its 15th year, anticipates more than 1,100 entries to compete in the event, set for Sept. 13-28.

Unlike a typical juried art competition, ArtPrize winners are selected by attendees, who vote for the pieces that move them. For the three Michigan-based artists Pride Source interviewed, ArtPrize is much more about the art than the prize.

### Isabel Dowell

“What Does It Mean to Be Queer?”  
ArtRat Gallery (46 Division Ave. S., Grand Rapids)

Grand Rapids photographer Isabel Dowell

explores gender and sexual identity in a photo exhibit featuring couples who wrote handwritten responses to the question “How does your gender and/or sexual identity influence who you are?” Each couple’s photo is displayed twice alongside the written responses but without identifiers. Many of the works feature individuals who present with less overt displays of typical gender roles or identities, leaving viewers in the dark about which member of which couple wrote each response.

Dowell, whose subjects often include artists and musicians, is a graduate student at nearby Aquinas College working toward a master’s in clinical mental health counseling. A sexuality counseling course inspired her ArtPrize exhibit. “I thought it would be really beneficial to my work to explore sexuality a little bit more and to just get to know the people around me who identified in the LGBTQ+ community,” Dowell tells BTL.

As she put together the exhibit, Dowell says she found herself in interesting conversations with her subjects, especially among couples where one person identified as queer and the other as straight and cisgender. “People who identified as straight and cisgender had never really had to think about how their gender or sexual identity influences them,” she says. “I had to explain to them that even if they were a straight cisgender male or female, the way in which they navigate the world based on

their gender still makes an impact on them. It was really important to me to have those conversations as well as giving voice to the queer individuals in my project.”

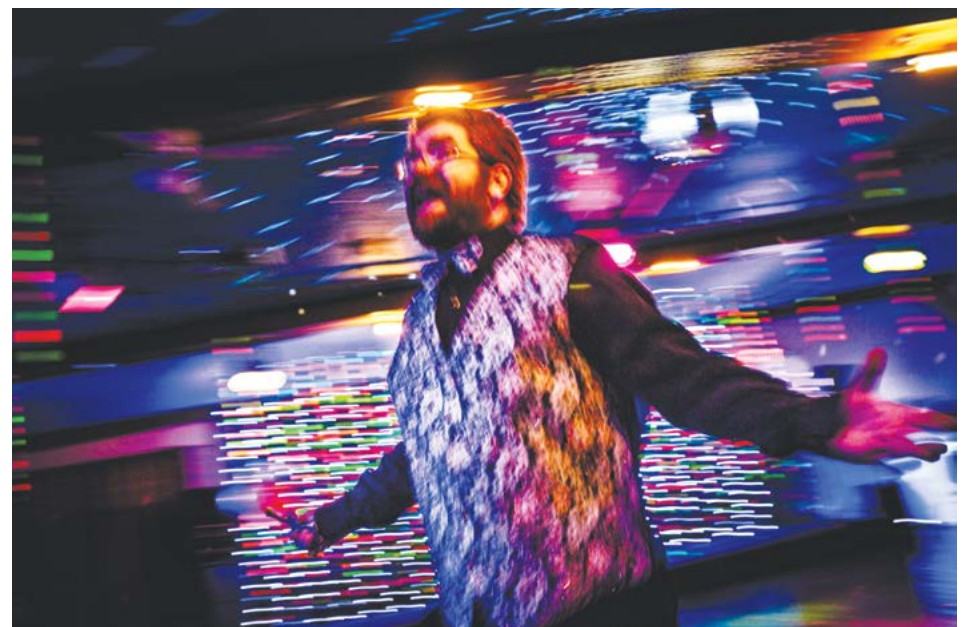
“The point of my project,” Dowell adds, “is just really exploring queer individuals in queer relationships and also puts an emphasis on queer people in heteronormative relationships.”

### Craig Rhyan

“Fireflies Seeking Calm and Chaos”

Outside the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum (303 Pearl St. NW., Grand Rapids)

There’s a good chance that Grand Rapids



From Pat ApPaul’s “Sovereign” exhibit.



area residents have seen the work of out gay artist Craig Rhyhan at a local park — his installation “Connections” at Briggs Park features hooks to hang a hammock — or in prominent locations like the base of the city’s famed Blue Bridge, where his “Lake Sturgeon” wooden sculpture is currently on display. The 7-foot fish weighs nearly 200 pounds and was built to match the size of the largest documented sturgeon caught in Michigan.

For ArtPrize, the 2024 Motu Viget Grant recipient has been finalizing a kinetic piece, “Fireflies Seeking Calm and Chaos,” that will be displayed outside the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum. Outside is where you’ll find most of Rhyhan’s art. Growing up in a small town in eastern Michigan, Rhyhan says, outside is where he spent most of his time.

“We just weren’t the family to be inside watching TV,” he explains. “We were outside exploring nature, building forts in the woods, turning over logs and finding creatures. Those childhood experiences inspire my artwork now — especially how nature relates to humanity and how that relationship can sometimes be a struggle, with humans kind of fighting for territory in a way. It’s also about showing nature in different ways. Some of the things that may go unnoticed in nature, I can give them a pedestal, so to speak, make them larger scale or use unique colors so you notice them more.”

Rhyhan’s “Fireflies” includes multiple moving lights representing lightning bugs. “Each light moves and interacts with the others, and they’re coming out of a bed of black cables,” Rhyhan explains. “So, again, it’s that kind of nature seeking calmness, surrounded by the city buzz — it’s the idea of humanity and nature interacting.”

**Pat ApPaul**  
“Sovereign”

En Vivo Church (133 Caledonia St. NE., Grand Rapids)

A Welsh photographer who moved to Michigan for love, Pat ApPaul has built his photography career on centering the voices of marginalized people throughout the world. His work has taken him to war-torn regions like Palestine and Iraq, but more recently, ApPaul has been inspired by life much closer to home, pointing his lens toward people living and working in Muskegon.

ApPaul spent time documenting people

dealing with mental health issues in his work “The Stand,” which focused on a mental health facility in Muskegon. That work was turned into a book of the same



Craig Rhyhan’s “Cypress Forest” sculpture, temporarily displayed at the foot of Grand Rapids’ Blue Bridge in 2023.

name and was displayed as part of an exhibition downtown. ApPaul’s newer work, “Sovereign,” is another take on the city he now calls home — one focused on the unexpected joy and affirmation he found among the local drag performer community.

“I wanted to focus on this community to find out why they are doing this work, how they move through life, how drag gives them agency,” ApPaul explains. The photographer did several shoots with the performers, who came from large urban centers like Chicago but mostly from small communities in Michigan, before the venue closed. “And after it was all over, I realized I really had something special here in these images,” he says. The photos represent a wide range of genders, sexualities, cultures and backgrounds. Importantly, they painted a picture of a true community of support and challenged perceptions about drag at a time when the artform is under attack. ApPaul says he felt it was important that as a straight, male LGBTQ+ ally that he shine a light on a culture that he finds inspiring — drag, he says, is something worthwhile he feels many people don’t understand is happening in their own backyards.

In addition to ApPaul’s ArtPrize exhibit, his drag-focused work will be available in an upcoming 52-page zine, also called “Sovereign,” the product of a recently funded Kickstarter campaign.

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## ◀ We Knew Her When

Continued from page 17

and if I wasn't those things then I was nothing. So to get over that hump took years, and I did know I was queer, though, since I was in seventh grade.

**How did growing up in a small town affect you as a queer person?**



Chappell Roan in Detroit in October 2023. Photo: Lucienne Nghiem

There was no queer representation. I didn't know a single out lesbian girl, gay girl, bi girl, nothing. There were a couple of gay boys in my school who were out and they got terrorized, slurred, threatened. I mean, it was horrible. I saw what would happen if you came out, and I knew that it was a sin at the time, and I think that to grow into the queer girl that I am today, I obviously had to stop dating men who were not it. I had to

stop settling for losers and start dating women and getting rid of that shame. I still struggle with it. I have a girlfriend now, and I just struggle with it still, but it's taken baby steps to get to a confident drag queen version of myself.

**Drag culture is a big part of your life and music. When did you find the art form really useful for coming into your authentic self?**

I think when I moved to West Hollywood. I had really never even seen a drag queen before. I was 18. It was Disney Princess vibes. When I went to Disney World when I was 7 and I saw Princess Jasmine, it's no different than me watching a drag show now. I'm in such awe of the makeup, the hair, the outfit, the dancing, the songs. It's just magical to me, and I just think it's the funnest thing ever to

watch a drag show. It's all for the fun of it, and I think [my] album is super obnoxious and very tongue-in-cheek, and I think that's exactly what drag queens do.

**Obviously, you love drag queens, you love the art form, but it's hard to ignore that it could also be kind of a political move by incorporating it into what you do. Is that part of the intent?**

I think it's just a way to not be afraid. Drag queens have always existed and they're not going anywhere. They're not unsafe. It's like, if anything, we need to keep the narrative in our court, in the queer people's court. The narrative is ours, and so if we stop, then the narrative becomes theirs, and I know it's very divided right now, but, dude, a lot of things that are everyday acceptable are like drag. It's like, stop, don't tell me that metal bands aren't drag queens. Do people know when they dress up for football games and paint their faces and do their hair crazy, that's drag? And yes, I do it to protect my community and literally prove that it's not dangerous, but also I feel like there's just a giant misunderstanding. It's obviously more of an attack on trans people than drag queens. I'm just kind of like, I don't think

you guys know what a drag show is. I bet they would have a lot of fun. I'm just like, you should come!

**Are there songs on this album that you can point to where those influences might be especially heavy?**

I mean, "Pink Pony Club" and "My Kink Is Karma." In the music video, I'm literally a drag clown devil situation. I learned how to

do drag brows and everything for that. I mean, even in "Casual."

**Who taught you drag brows?**

Patrick Starr on YouTube. I think the songs themselves have drag elements, but more so in the visual aspects of how I do my makeup on stage or just "Casual." There's this mermaid drag girly who comes out of the water. It's very campy. I think all the songs are very camp, and I think if you're taking it seriously, you see it as tasteless, but the reality is that's just drag; it's supposed to be tacky.

**It explains your appreciation for "Showgirls."**

That is the most insane movie. Every time I watch it, I'm like, what the fuck?

**For the album, you also recruited Mike Weiss, who has worked with Charli XCX on some of her biggest gay songs of her career. How did that relationship start?**

We were just so stuck on "Super Graphic Ultra Modern Girl." It was so frustrating. We just couldn't get it across the finish line. It was just lacking a lot of depth, and I was just like, "You know what? Who does Charli's shit?" Because I loved "Yuck" and I loved a lot of stuff on "Crash." So we asked him, and he pretty much nailed it, first try. I was like damn, he *was* the key.

**When you look at the landscape of pop artists right now, how does it feel to be among those in the pool of queer artists? And what would you like to see when it comes to LGBTQ+ visibility within the pop arena?**

To be part of it is much more fun than what I was a part of before, which was this dark alt-pop girl vibe that was really just not fun. Gay clubs are much more fun than street clubs. The thing is, I love seeing other queer artists, of course, and I love talking to them. I feel like there's a little alliance with all the queer girllies. I was literally talking to Renee Rapp this morning, and then Hayley Kiyoko and I are friends and, obviously, I opened up for Fletcher. There's a lot of little pop girllies that are friends. I know for my project, I am very

adamant about giving back to the queer community, and that is what I encourage other artists to do, whether they're queer or not: just giving back to the community that supports them so much, whether that be by lowering ticket prices to what they can, or lowering merch prices to what they can, or donating a portion of every ticket or doing charity events. That's the most important part, because no one's going to stand up for queer people. It's got to be us. We have to support each other. We have to do mutual aid funding and mutual safe spaces, and I try to donate to and a portion of every ticket goes to For The Gwols, which is a grassroots Black trans charity out of New York. I know that there are massive queer charities, but I think it's just important to fund the little ones as well.

**As a Midwest princess, what's the extent of your Michigan experiences?**

Oh, I love Michigan.

**You've been?**

I went to summer camp at Interlochen. I feel like everyone who goes to Interlochen at some point becomes famous. It changed my life, it literally changed my life. I've never met creative kids before that camp, and it changed my trajectory forever. A song I wrote there is what got me signed.

**How else did it change your life?**

I'd never been with other songwriters before in my life that were my age. Everyone was a fucking hippie, and I'm from Trump country. I'm from a heavily church background, and this is not that. There were kids from all over the world there. It was just so inspiring, and I wrote a song there and a few months later I was literally sought out by record labels and six months later got signed for five years.

**What's the song?**

"Die Young."

**Made here in Michigan?**

Made there in Michigan.



# Chappell Roan, Lollapalooza and a Whole Summer of Queer Celebration

What the rising pop phenom’s record-breaking Lollapalooza crowd means for the queer community



Lollapalooza 2024 attendees. Photo: Nathan Zucker

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Chicago’s Grant Park has likely never seen as much pink as it did on Aug. 1. That’s because Chappell Roan, self-proclaimed “Midwest princess” and rising pop phenom, requested on social media that her fans wear pink — or bring something of the color — to her set so she could spot them while on stage. Truth is, it would have been almost impossible to find someone not wearing pink.

“I think every person I’ve helped today has bought merch of hers,” said a worker at the artist merch tent. The tent was equipped for demand, stocked with pink bandanas from the “Pink Pony Club” singer’s merch line.

Roan’s 5 p.m. performance on the first day of this year’s Lollapalooza music festival in Chicago was something for the history books. Not only did Roan’s crowd surpass the numbers for all the nightly headliners, but a spokesperson for the festival told CNN that the crowd likely surpassed any crowd during the festival’s tenure in the city.

“Chappell’s performance was the biggest daytime set we’ve ever seen,” said the

spokesperson.

What’s bigger than the numbers, though, is what they mean.

Roan is an outspoken lesbian artist performing at a mainstream music festival. She sings about kissing at slumber parties, trying new things (sexually or not), maybe going to hell (but probably being fine), and places “where boys and girls can all be queens.”

Roan’s music has catapulted into the mainstream since she supported Olivia Rodrigo on her Guts World Tour earlier this year. To put it into perspective, Roan’s monthly listeners on Spotify hit one million just less than a year ago, in September 2023. At the time of publication, her monthly listens are nearing 40 million. And it won’t be surprising if we continue to see those numbers rise following this festival circuit.

She narrates her personal experiences in a way that still resonates with a wide breadth of people. That alleged record-breaking Lollapalooza crowd consisted of more than just queer people, but people of differing identities and walks of life from wide-

See *Lollapalooza*, page 28



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## ◀ Lollapalooza

Continued from page 27

ranging locations. Many people traveled to Chicago from out of state — and even out of the country — to see Roan, because it was cheaper to pay for transportation and buy a ticket to the festival than her individual shows, due to high scalper prices.

Leading up to the festival, Lollapalooza organizers swapped Roan's stage assignment with pop singer Kesha to allow for the anticipated large crowd. But the impact on the festival — the "femininomenon," if you will — is something that likely wasn't fully anticipated.

Roan's own small-town queer experience will resonate with anyone who grew up without the kind of visibility that makes it easier to be who you are.

"It was a magical moment added to Lolla's DNA," a festival spokesperson told CNN.

Now an annual Chicago-based festival, Lollapalooza originally started as a touring event in 1991, the brainchild of singer Perry Farrell of Jane's Addiction as part of the band's farewell tour. In its early years, Lollapalooza was considered an alt-rock showcase, with headliners like Nine Inch Nails, Smashing Pumpkins and Rage Against the Machine. Now, it leans into being a multi-genre festival with a varied lineup, local artists and a vendor fair featuring food booths, social and political campaigns, and nonprofit organizations.

Lollapalooza has a history of highlighting diverse artists and promoting conversation around acceptance and love. Their website states, "We dream of an America where 'we the people' means all of us and all people can thrive. A future beyond poverty, pollution, prisons and polarization. A future with freedom, dignity and opportunity for all."

Organizers try to adhere to that mission carefully considering which artists to invite and the overall aura of each fest. In fact, in 2021, the festival pulled DaBaby from its lineup after he went on a homophobic rant at Rolling Loud festival in Miami the week before he was set to perform.

On stage, DaBaby said, "If you didn't show up today with HIV, AIDS or any of them deadly sexually transmitted diseases that'll make you die in two to three weeks, then put your cellphone lighter up."

He continued the rant by adding, "Fellas, if you ain't sucking dick in the parking lot, put your cellphone lighter up."

A statement on the festival's social media said, "Lollapalooza was founded on diversity, inclusivity, respect and love. With that in mind, DaBaby will no longer be performing at Grant Park tonight."

In addition to Roan, this year's festival showcased other outspoken queer artists,

*"In a time where the political climate is so charged, having celebrations of love, even when they aren't supported by everyone, and having a place [where you can] tell there is love and acceptance is incredible."*

— Lollapalooza attendee  
Elena Garcia

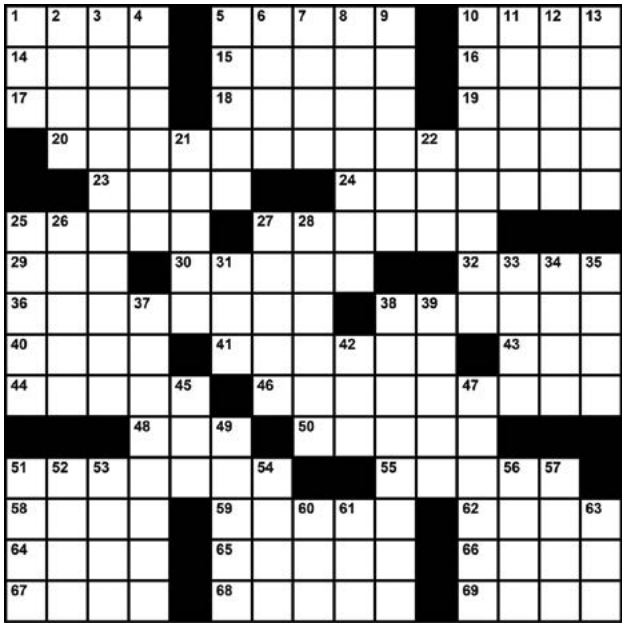
including Renee Rapp, Megan Thee Stallion, The Japanese House, Ethel Cain, Victoria Monet and Kevin Abstract. Fans anxiously awaited each set, many with DIY shirts, Pride flags and "I Heart Pretty Girls" hats in tow.

"It feels very loving and accepting here," said concertgoer Jason Sekili. "And it definitely doesn't feel like that everywhere."

Elena Garcia, another concertgoer, agreed: "In a time where the political climate is so charged, having celebrations of love, even when they aren't supported by everyone, and having a place [where you can] tell there is love and acceptance is incredible," she said.

After her set, Roan shared on her socials that she was crying as she walked on stage due to "the overwhelm of support." She then said she "will remember this moment forever." It's safe to say attendees will, too.





## The Triple Crown

### Across

- 1 Stephen McCauley's "The \_\_\_\_ Way Out"  
5 Hibernate with the bears  
10 Gay beach near San Francisco  
14 Pilate's "Behold!"  
15 "To \_\_\_\_ Mockingbird"  
16 Hathaway of "Brokeback

- Mountain"  
17 Male actor named Julia  
18 "What does she see \_\_\_\_?"  
19 They may show through a wet T-shirt  
20 Start of what a former show host said facetiously would be the triple crown of her demise  
23 Be a voyeur, e.g.  
24 Characters in "Rent"  
25 Dish in a lab  
27 Pirate's bird  
29 Former Burmese leader  
30 Its capital is Accra

### Down

- 1 Always, to Emily Dickinson  
2 Anti-oxidant berry  
3 Davish and Moses, to Michelangelo  
4 Disney dog Old \_\_\_\_  
5 Biathlete, for one  
6 Way to get to gay.com  
7 For most students  
8 Complex of a lesbian who loves mommy?  
9 Dorothy of "You can lead a horticulture..." fame

- 10 Went out with guys?  
11 It could be civil  
12 Where to penetrate an electronic device  
13 Takes a breather  
21 Drag queen's hosiery hue, perhaps  
22 Brian of glam rock  
25 Blows smoke rings  
26 \_\_\_\_ Gay  
27 "Dykes to Watch Out For" section  
28 Jets to Sharks, on Broadway  
31 Made oneself hard to find  
33 Opposed to, to Gomer  
34 Initiated phone sex  
35 Sleeps (with), to Shakespeare  
37 Huge thing  
38 Tithe, at Metropolitan Community Church  
39 Disinfectant brand  
42 Monopoly abbr.  
45 "We \_\_\_\_ Family"  
47 Out, at the library  
49 David Sedaris book  
51 Nuts and bolts  
52 Feisty female in "The Lion King"  
53 Durango deity  
54 Campbell of "The Company"  
56 Toledo's lake  
57 Lorca's zip  
60 What fifty million Frenchmen drink  
61 Former govt. watchdog  
63 \_\_\_\_ dance (stripper's offering)

See p. 20 for answers





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### ◀ Terry Guest

Continued from page 18

interesting if I created a show that implicated the audience to change things where they can in their own community.”

As for the genre, Guest said he relished the new challenge of writing science fiction. He is eager to see the audience respond to this work, hoping they will be surprised.

“They might expect it to be kind of serious and a show that is wagging its finger and teaching them about water injustice,” Guest said. “It’s fun and sexy and naughty. It’s a tone I don’t often write in. My experience as a writer has been mostly focused on the Black, queer experience. The main character [in ‘Thirst’] is a Black queer person — but I am putting my words in the voices of white people in a way that I haven’t done before.”

While “Thirst” works its way to opening in the fall, Guest continues to spread his voice throughout the theatrical world. His play “Oak” just closed at Urbanite Theatre in Sarasota, Florida and will be going on to three other theaters as part of a rolling world premiere. The dark comedy is a Southern Gothic horror about three kids, an old woman with a shotgun and a mysterious



Terry Guest in “At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen.” Courtesy photo

creek monster.

He’s also been commissioned to write two musicals. The Goodman commissioned Guest and NJ Draine to create “Nightbirds,” which had its first public reading on July 14. A group of three theater companies commissioned him to create the children’s musical “Milo Imagines the World.”

Guest said he wants to keep writing plays and hopes to someday write and direct a movie and direct musicals.

“I want to get to a point where I can follow my creative curiosity and people will trust me enough to let me do that,” Guest said.

As for what he wants people to think of him, his answer came easily: “I want people to be like, wow, it’s so amazing that he is so kind for someone so talented.”

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